

DETAILED ACTION

Response to Amendment

1. An examiner's amendment to the record appears below. Should the changes and/or additions be unacceptable to applicant, an amendment may be filed as provided by 37 CFR 1.312. To ensure consideration of such an amendment, it MUST be submitted no later than the payment of the issue fee.

Authorization for this examiner's amendment was given in the telephone interviews with Mr. Dolph Torrence on 06/10/2009.

2. The following changes to the claims have been approved by the examiner and agreed upon by applicant:

In claim 24, after "step", line 3, insert -- is performed by a panoramic image acquisition unit --.

Allowable Subject Matter

3. Claims 1-2, 4-25 and 27-46 are allowed.

The following is an examiner's statement of reasons for allowance: As to independent claim 1, the prior art does not teach or fairly suggest an apparatus for creating, managing and publishing interactive virtual tours, the apparatus comprising: a panorama data acquisition unit implementing means of capturing panoramic data representing a plurality of environment maps and preparing said panoramic data for further processing, wherein said panoramic data acquisition unit comprises at least one versatile device for creating

representations of stimuli coveting substantially all directions around a given reference or view point, said versatile device for creating representations of stimuli comprising at least one grid of one or more focusing elements disposed on an N-dimensional shaped surface, at least one grid of one or more sensor elements disposed on an N-dimensional shaped surface, and at least one grid of one or more stimulus guide elements disposed on an N-dimensional shaped surface, wherein said focusing element grid is adapted to focus stimuli coveting substantially all directions around a given reference or view point onto the sensor element grid via the stimulus guide unit, wherein each focusing element or group of focusing elements is associated with and focuses a subset of the entire stimulus space onto a sensor element or group of sensor elements responsive to the stimuli, and in combination with other elements.

As to independent claim 24, the prior art does not teach or fairly suggest a method of creating, managing and publishing interactive virtual tours, said method comprising: a panorama data acquisition step is performed by a panoramic image acquisition unit for capturing panoramic data representing a plurality of environment maps and preparing said panoramic data for further processing, wherein said panoramic data acquisition step utilizes at least one versatile device for creating representations of stimuli covering substantially all directions around a given reference or view point, said versatile device for creating representations of stimuli comprising at least one grid of one or more focusing elements disposed on an N-dimensional shaped surface, at least one grid of one or more sensor elements disposed on an N-dimensional shaped surface, and at least one grid of one or more stimulus guide elements disposed on an N-dimensional shaped surface, wherein said focusing

element grid is adapted to focus stimuli coveting substantially all directions around a given reference or view point onto the sensor element grid via the stimulus guide unit, wherein each focusing element or group of focusing elements is associated with and focuses a subset of the entire stimulus space onto a sensor element or group of sensor elements responsive to the stimuli, and in combination with other elements.

As to claims 2, 4-23, 25, and 27-46, these claims are dependent upon allowable claims 1 and 24, respectively and are thus also considered allowable over the prior art.

Any comments considered necessary by applicant must be submitted no later than the payment of the issue fee and, to avoid processing delays, should preferably accompany the issue fee. Such submissions should be clearly labeled “Comments on Statement of Reasons for Allowance.”

Conclusion

4. Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Kent Wang whose telephone number is 571-270-1703. The examiner can normally be reached on 8:00 A.M. - 5:30 PM (every other Friday off).

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Sinh Tran can be reached on 571-272-7564. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-270-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information

for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

/Tuan V Ho/
Primary Examiner, Art Unit 2622
KW
8 June 2009